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ABSTRACT

In working with the institutional public relations staff, the following are important: maintaining easy-to-access files; keeping ready-to-use photographs; providing all of the information that is needed for the story; preparing tip sheets that list several story ideas; and keeping in touch with the public relations staff. With the electronic media, cooperative education programs can prepare public service announcements and participate in public affairs programs. Institutional resources, such as special publications and new technologies, should be used. If the institution has a problem that will attract public attention, get the facts, decide on one spokesperson, rehearse an interview with all of the toughest questions, and do not lie. (CML)

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John W. Mosser, Editor; Terrence A. Taylor, Associate Editor

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Public Relations Guidelines for Cooperative Education

by Terrence A. Taylor

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a public relations and design consulting firm.*

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INTRODUCTION

The business of the journalist is to transmit the news accurately and fairly to an audience. The business of the public relations (PR) professional is broader and in some ways more challenging.

The PR person works not only with journalists, but with designers, writers, printers, audio and video producers, and photographers. The goal is sharing news and information with the most positive impact on behalf of an institution or program, such as co-op. Similarly, the PR professional works with a variety of "publics" (Kotler and Andreasen, 1987) including *internal publics* (students, faculty and staff) and *external publics* (employers as well as people outside the institution who you reach through your PR efforts).

Kotler & Andreasen (1987) describe the historical evolution of public relations from primitive to contemporary society:

Edward L. Bernays, one of the fathers of modern public relations, posited that the three main elements of public relations are as old as society: informing people, persuading people, and integrating people with people. Bernays traced public relations from primitive society, in which leaders controlled by force, intimidation, and persuasion, to Babylonia, where kings commissioned historians to paint favorable images of them. The Renaissance and Reformation freed people's minds from established dogmas, thus leading institutions to develop more subtle means of influencing people. In America, historical milestones for public relations include:

- Samuel Adams's use of the press to unite the colonists against the British.
- The abolitionist movement's use of public relations as a political tool to rally support for blacks in the North, including the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
- P.T. Barnum's use of public relations to generate newsworthiness about an event--the arrival of the circus--by placing articles in newspapers. (p. 575)

Cooperative education offices do not typically maintain their own PR operations. Frequently co-op offices work with other college or university staff who do PR on their behalf. This digest will present guidelines that can help you maximize the results of your cooperative education public relations effort. Before beginning a formal discussion of how to work with the public relations office, it helps to remember that the individuals who use your program are your most important public relations agents.

STUDENTS AND EMPLOYERS AS FIRST-LINE PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENTS

If the students and employers with whom you work are happy, they will tell their friends, parents and co-workers. If they are unhappy, they will usually tell even more people, including your boss.

As you begin your PR effort, survey students and typical employers to find how they view your co-op program. Determine what they like, and what they don't like. Use this information to plan your PR efforts. Try to eliminate what they don't like. Then, emphasize your most positive features and benefits in all of your public relations vehicles (brochures, news releases, public service announcements, TV interviews).

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As your efforts progress, stop from time to time and survey your original sample of students and employers to get an ongoing picture of how you are doing.

WORKING WITH YOUR INSTITUTIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS STAFF

One of the keys to success in public relations is making the job of the journalist easier. If you can save the TV or newspaper journalist time, steps, effort and trouble, you'll win a friend.

The same holds true for your college or university PR staff. Like all of us, they are frequently overworked and underappreciated. If you sit back and wait for them to do the entire PR job on your behalf, you won't be nearly as happy with the results as you will be if you are an active partner in the PR process.

MAINTAIN EASY-TO-ACCESS FILES

The easiest thing you can do to assist your institutional PR staff is make sure that you have good, up-to-date files and records for all of your co-op placements and employers. Your PR staff may contact you at a moment's notice needing information about a student or employer for a breaking news story. It's extremely important that you are able to quickly answer questions about any of your current operations (within a few minutes).

KEEP READY-TO-USE PHOTOGRAPHS

The same holds true for photographs and slides. If you have an opportunity to take black and white photographs of your students on the job, please do. PR professionals are always searching for file photos to use in brochures or on posters. If you have a file of relatively new or recent photos, you will have a high probability of appearing in more of your institutions's publications.

Most useful are pictures of students with employers in an action setting. Posed pictures (especially of individuals shaking hands and smiling) are deadly dull, and probably unusable. When taking pictures, try not to use a flash unit. The shadows created in flash photos tend to make your pictures look like they were taken in the 1950's. If you are using a 35 millimeter camera, films like Kodak's TRI-X will allow you to take pictures under normal office or laboratory light.

If you need help planning a photo, look through a magazine such as *Life*, or *People* or read the classic *Visual Impact in Print* by Hurley and McDougall (1971). This book sets out in clear and understandable language everything the beginner needs to know about how to take good photographs.

When you get ready to take a picture, look through the camera's viewfinder. Try to fill that space with the people in your picture. One of the most common errors made by amateur photographers is that they stand too far away from the subject of their picture. Don't be afraid to walk right up to within two feet of your subject. This may feel a little uncomfortable, but you will achieve far superior photographic results.

Keep a file of color slides. Color prints are not nearly as useful. The equipment used in the printing of color brochures and posters works better with slides. One brief technical word here: if you use a 35 millimeter camera indoors under fluorescent light you can buy an inexpensive filter (\$10-\$15) for your lense that will remove the unattractive greenish tint that such lights give to color pictures or slides.

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Keep in mind that whether you are taking photographs or slides, the eye of the person who looks at your picture will be drawn first to whatever is lightest in color or brightest in the picture (e.g., a white shirt rather than the happy expression on the faces of your subjects). Use this information in planning your picture. Cover or remove anything that is distracting in the picture (Hurley & McDougal, 1971).

GETTING NEWS TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

Begin by getting together all of the information that's needed to tell your story.

The first piece of information your PR staff needs to know is whether or not your story is "newsworthy" for outside media such as TV or newspaper. Remember that journalists are frequently overwhelmed with "news" about dog beauty contests, and other "important" events. If you aren't sure about an event or story, ask your PR professionals for a second opinion. Sometimes it's possible to make an item newsworthy by careful management. Co-op day on campus may not be newsworthy for your city newspaper. Co-op day on campus with a kick-off speech by the mayor or another local celebrity may be newsworthy. Events that feature a major anniversary (10, 15, 20, 25, 50, 100 years) often get attention. Events that have a tie in with a national or state event, or a designated "week" (i.e. National Co-op Education Week) are almost sure to get a couple of column inches in your local paper or 30 seconds on the evening news.

Once you have decided that an event is newsworthy, the next thing to do is gather all of the details and write them down in a clear, direct way, with the most important facts first. Your PR office may want to send out a news release on its own stationery, in its own style. If you write a draft release, you will save them time and energy. Your draft should answer six key questions: who, what, when, where, why and how. If the attendance of a celebrity is the most important fact, put that in the first sentence. If the date (the 100th birthday of the program) is most important, lead with that fact. A good rule of thumb is to think of your news release as an upside-down pyramid, with the facts listed in descending order from most important to least important. This will ensure that the PR staff and news professionals see what is most important to you first. If possible, devote one paragraph to each key fact. Write in simple declarative sentences. Double and triple-check each and every fact for accuracy. Incorrect information can destroy your credibility. Make sure that your draft release contains the name and phone number of someone from your office who will be available and who can provide additional information if it is needed.

TIP SHEETS

One handy tool for PR is the tip sheet. This is a list of four, five, or six story ideas which is sent to newspapers, radio stations, and TV newsrooms. The goal of the tip sheet is to garner the interest of a journalist in a feature story on a particular topic. Here, newsworthiness or uniqueness is the key. A tip sheet usually devotes only one paragraph to each "tip". On a tip sheet, it isn't necessary to answer the who, what, etc., but be sure to include the name and phone number of a contact person who has all of the details for each tip.

A co-op tip sheet might feature teasers such as:

1. The story of an astronaut about to travel on the space shuttle who started as a co-op student at your college;
2. A co-op student who learned a business, started her own, and has won an award;
3. The first female co-op worker in an all-male business (or the first male in an all-female business);

4. A co-op student involved in a business working abroad;
5. A student working for a government agency and working on a project that has recently been featured in a national news story;
6. A reminder that National Co-op Awareness Week is approaching.

Two weeks is good lead time for a story such as those itemized above. Then the story isn't too early to be forgotten or too late to prevent research for an in-depth feature.

HOMETOWNERS

Most colleges produce news releases about students who receive honors, travel abroad, or participate in sports. These releases are mailed to newspapers in the student's hometown. Check with your PR office to see if they will do hometown releases for the students involved in co-op. Don't forget to help make the PR job easier by providing detailed, accurate information for each student. Include a draft release.

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH YOUR PR STAFF

Make it a habit to call your director of PR every couple of weeks to talk over possible story ideas. Try to put this on your calendar for the day following a co-op program staff meeting. At the staff meeting pick the brains of your staff for story ideas. Again, get out your desk calendar and put a teaser down for calling the PR director every two weeks throughout the year.

THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA: RADIO AND TV

THE EASY TOUCH — PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

Because broadcast radio and TV stations have the public's trust of the airwaves, they are required to devote time to "public affairs". One aspect of public affairs is the public service announcement (PSA), usually read by one of the station's announcers. The PSA is usually 15 or 30 seconds in length, and concerns an upcoming event that is free and open to the public. (Fundraisers for worthy causes may be an exception because proceeds are used for a not-for-profit cause). Stations usually want the PSA two or three weeks in advance of the event. The station will usually broadcast the announcement more than once.

It is standard policy to send PSA's to all stations in the area where the event will take place. Particular emphasis should be placed on the stations with the largest audience. PSA's seem like an afterthought, but they may reach 10 times as many people as newspapers in the same area. Moreover, it is a good idea to remind your PR office to send out both a news release and a PSA for the same event. With the advent of cable television, many cable companies offer a public access station that may televise a daily calendar of events which features brief written announcements throughout the day. These cable TV calendars have surprisingly large audiences that shouldn't be ignored.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAMS

Local television and radio stations usually broadcast a half-hour public affairs program, often on weekends, that features one or more guests who are interviewed on topics of current public interest. This is a natural for co-op. The co-op director,

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a student, and a local employer would make a great team to discuss how participating in co-op can help students pay for tuition while they learn a career. Use your imagination. There are many possibilities. Your PR office should have a list of names and phone numbers for the producers of these programs.

You might think that these interview programs aren't worth your time. However, keep in mind that a radio program on Sunday morning is listened to by thousands of families driving to or from church. And Sunday morning TV has few competitors for those who stay at home.

A WORD ON HOW TO DEAL WITH TV NEWS CREWS

The impact of TV news is so great it demands special attention. If your name has been in the newspaper, a friend or two may have congratulated you. But if you were featured in a story on your local TV evening news, you were probably congratulated by half your office staff, your babysitter, the bagger at the grocery store, your mother and your insurance agent.

When a TV reporter calls you or is referred to you by the PR office, it will most frequently happen late in the morning or early in the afternoon. The story the reporter will want to do will most probably be for that evening. The reporter will need instant help since he or she will need to get back to the station. This may require that you drop whatever you are doing. Try not to let this intimidate you. When the reporter calls, ask what information he or she needs. You will probably be able to choose the spokesperson for the story. Remember that the person they want to interview isn't necessarily the most knowledgeable but, the most articulate person who can tell the story completely and accurately. TV reporters usually need two things: 1) a sound bite (the interview) and 2) visuals, (after all, TV is a visual medium).

College faculty and staff frequently complain that TV reduces what they have to say to 10 or 15 seconds, and that reporters only use the most sensational thing they have said. This isn't a disadvantage if you remember to reserve your most colorful language for the most important thing you have to say. For example, if you are asked if it's difficult to do your job, the response, "It's very challenging," won't have nearly the impact of "Let's just say it's like climbing Mount Everest while carrying a grand piano."

When a TV reporter arrives on the scene, you can usually choose the setting for the interview. If you have a sign or banner with the name of your program on it, place it so that it is seen by the camera. Before the interview, ask the reporter what questions will be asked, then take a few moments to prepare your responses. If the reporter plans to interview a student or employer, be sure to advise this person of his or her rights. Students, especially, feel obligated to answer all questions. They don't have to. It's o.k. to tell a reporter, "I don't want to answer the question". And if you are asked a really tough question that misses the point, don't be afraid to say, "That question misses the point. The real story is".

You will get even better service if you treat these reporters with the courtesy they deserve. Tell them on the phone how to find your office and where to park. Get them a parking pass. Meet them where they park. Offer to carry equipment. Show them where electrical outlets are located.

Most importantly, have a fact sheet ready. This should contain important information about the story. Spell all important names. Give them your phone number in case they need to call you after office hours with a last minute question.

If you plan to offer your own video to a TV station, keep in mind that most stations don't like the 1/2 inch tape used in home video recorders. They need 3/4 inch professional quality tape. The exception is tape of plane crashes, accidents, fire, etc.

However, don't be afraid to ask your PR office if it produces its own video news releases. If it does, use video releases in the same way you use written releases.

UTILIZING INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

PLUG INTO SPECIAL PUBLICATIONS

Your institution probably produces special promotional publications such as calendars or expert speakers brochures. Check to make sure that the co-op program is featured in all of these. Also make sure that your office telephone number is listed in these as well as in the school catalog, course listings, and admissions recruiting materials. In an era when the number of potential students is declining, your admissions staff will be happy to have a proactive co-op professional who is anxious to cooperate.

Have a talk with the editor of the school alumni publication. Feature stories on co-op are a real possibility, especially if you have a few good story ideas (see TIP SHEETS above). Staff newsletters, and other school periodicals are other possibilities.

And here's a *free* tip: most printing projects for brochures or other items leave a little bit of paper left over. If you plan carefully, you can use this wastage at practically no cost. One college recently produced 10,000 bookmarks with a color photo for just \$100 (Cooperative Education Marketing, Inc., 1989, Fall).

NEW TECHNOLOGY

Virtually all newspapers as well as radio and TV stations have FAX machines (machines that allow you to transmit a photo copy across telephone lines). Some papers and stations even admit that they respond better to FAXed releases than to releases they receive in the mail.

If you have an important message for employers, try FAXing it instead of mailing it. Use your telephone answering machine to announce upcoming events. If you have a slide and audio tape program, you can have it transferred to videotape for a modest fee. Make copies of this tape to give to top administrators at your institution, including admissions, alumni, public relations and fund-raising staff.

The public relations productivity tool for the 1990's will undoubtedly be desk top publishing (DTP). With DTP software and a personal computer you can virtually eliminate the need for designers and typesetters, and save your program thousands of dollars each year. More importantly, you will be able to speed up the printing process by as much as ten times. The initial investment (computer, laser printer, software) begins at about \$6,000.

A WORD ON HOW TO DEAL WITH BAD NEWS

If you have a problem that will attract public attention, be prepared. First, get all persons who know about the problem together in one room. Lay out all the details for everyone. Then, decide on one spokesperson who will deal with all media

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contacts. Rehearse an interview and ask all of the toughest questions. Then hone all answers until they serve your goal. Don't lie. If you can't answer a reporter's questions, say so.

SUMMARY: BE YOURSELF

Whether you are dealing with bad news or good, it is important to project a consistent image. There is a great tendency to change directions with whatever news breeze blows. Such changes can quickly destroy your image. Try to be someone who speaks honestly, acts quickly but carefully, and who can be relied upon in a pinch. Little more is necessary.

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